

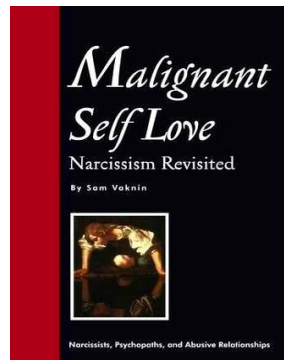
A Dialog about Anti-Semitism

By [Sam Vaknin](#)

(The author is a Jew and an Israeli)

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"Only loss is universal and true cosmopolitanism in this world must be based on suffering."

Ignacio Silone

Rabid anti-Semitism, coupled with inane and outlandish conspiracy theories of world dominion, is easy to counter and dispel. It is the more "reasoned", subtle, and stealthy variety that is pernicious. "No smoke without fire," - say people - "there must be something to it!".

In this dialog I try to deconstruct a "mild" anti-Semitic text. I myself wrote the text - not an easy task considering my ancestry (a Jew) and my citizenship (an Israeli).

But to penetrate the pertinent layers - historical, psychological, semantic, and semiotic - I had to "enter the skin" of "rational", classic anti-Semites, to grasp what makes them click and tick, and to think and reason like them.

I dedicated the last few months to ploughing through reams of anti-Semitic tracts and texts. Steeped in more or less nauseating verbal insanity and sheer paranoia, I emerged to compose the following.

The Anti-Semite:

The rising tide of anti-Semitism the world over is universally decried. The proponents of anti-Semitism are cast as ignorant, prejudiced, lawless, and atavistic. Their arguments are dismissed off-handedly.

But it takes one Jew to really know another. Conditioned by millennia of persecution, Jews are paranoid, defensive, and obsessively secretive. It is impossible for a gentile - whom they hold to be inferior and reflexively hostile - to penetrate their counsels.

Let us examine anti-Semitic arguments more closely and in an unbiased manner:

Argument number one - ***Being Jewish is a racial distinction - not only a religious one***

If race is defined in terms of genetic purity, then Jews are as much a race as the remotest and most isolated of the tribes of the Amazon. Genetic studies revealed that Jews throughout the world - largely due to centuries of in-breeding - share the same genetic makeup. Hereditary diseases which afflict only the Jews attest to the veracity of this discovery.

Judaism is founded on shared biology as much as shared history and customs. As a religion, it proscribes a conjugal union with non-Jews. Jews are not even allowed to partake the food and wine of gentiles and have kept their distance from the communities which they inhabited - maintaining tenaciously, through countless generations, their language, habits, creed, dress, and national ethos. Only Jews become automatic citizens of Israel (the infamous Law of Return).

The Jewish Response:

Race has been invariably used as an argument against the Jews. It is ironic that racial purists have always been the most fervent anti-Semites. Jews are not so much a race as a community, united in age-old traditions and beliefs, lore and myths, history and language. Anyone can become a Jew by following a set of clear (though, admittedly, demanding) rules. There is absolutely no biological test or

restriction on joining the collective that is known as the Jewish people or the religion that is Judaism.

It is true that some Jews are differentiated from their gentile environments. But this distinction has largely been imposed on us by countless generations of hostile hosts and neighbors. The yellow Star of David was only the latest in a series of measures to isolate the Jews, clearly mark them, restrict their economic and intellectual activities, and limit their social interactions. The only way to survive was to stick together. Can you blame us for responding to what you yourselves have so enthusiastically instigated?

The Anti-Semite:

Argument number two - ***The Jews regard themselves as Chosen, Superior, or Pure***

Vehement protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, this is largely true. Your purported and self-imputed ancestor, Abraham, struck a Faustian deal with Yahwe or Jehova, the [monotheistic deity](#) he conjured up: he sold Jehovah his soul in return for promises of wealth, might, and earthly possessions (notably, land) granted to him and to his lineage, now branded “The Chosen People”.

Orthodox Jews and secular Jews differ, of course, in their perception of this supremacy. The religious attribute it to divine will, intellectuals to the outstanding achievements of Jewish scientists and scholars, the modern Israeli is proud of his invincible army and thriving economy. But they all share a sense of privilege and commensurate obligation to civilize their inferiors and to spread progress and enlightenment wherever they are. This is a pernicious rendition of the colonial White Man's Burden and it is coupled with disdain and contempt for the lowly and the great unwashed (namely, the gentiles).

The Jewish Response:

There were precious few Jews among the great colonizers and ideologues of imperialism (Disraeli being the exception). Moreover, to compare the dissemination of knowledge and enlightenment to colonialism is, indeed, a travesty.

We, the Jews, are proud of our achievements. Show me one group of people (including the anti-Semites) who isn't? But there is an abyss between being justly proud of one's true accomplishments and feeling superior as a result. Granted, there are [narcissists](#) and megalomaniacs everywhere and among the members of any human collective. Hitler and his Aryan superiority is a good example.

The Anti-Semite:

Argument number three - *Jews have divided loyalties*

It is false to say that Jews are first and foremost Jews and only then are they the loyal citizens of their respective countries. Jews have unreservedly fought and sacrificed in the service of their homelands, often killing their coreligionists in the process. But it is true that Jews believe that what is good for the Jews is good for the country they reside in. By aligning the interests of their adopted habitat with their narrower and selfish agenda, Jews feel justified to promote their own interests to the exclusion of all else and all others.

Moreover, the rebirth of the Jewish State presented the Jews with countless ethical dilemmas which they typically resolved by adhering uncritically to Tel-Aviv's official line. This often brought them into direct conflict with their governments and non-Jewish compatriots and enhanced their reputation as untrustworthy and treacherous.

Hence the Jewish propensity to infiltrate decision-making centers, such as politics and the media. Their aim is to minimize conflicts of interests by transforming their peculiar concerns and preferences into official, if not always consensual, policy. This viral hijacking of the host country's agenda is particularly evident in the United States where the interest of Jewry and of the only superpower have become inextricable.

It is a fact - not a rant - that Jews are over-represented in certain, influential, professions (in banking, finance, the media, politics, the film industry, publishing, science, the humanities, etc.). This is partly the result of their emphases on education and social upward mobility. But it is also due to the tendency of well-placed Jews to promote their brethren and provide them with privileged access to opportunities, funding, and jobs.

The Jewish Response:

Most modern polities are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural (an anathema to anti-Semites, I know). Every ethnic, religious, cultural, political, intellectual, and economic or business group tries to influence policy-making by various means. This is both legitimate and desirable. Lobbying has been an integral and essential part of democracy since it was invented in Athens 2500 years ago. The Jews and Israelis are no exception.

Jews are, indeed, over-represented in certain professions in the United States. But they are under-represented in other, equally important, vocations (for instance, among company CEOs, politicians, diplomats, managers of higher education institutions, and senior bankers). Globally, Jews are severely under-represented or not-existent in virtually all professions due to their demography (aging population, low birth-rates, unnatural deaths in wars and slaughters).

The Anti-Semite:

Argument number four - *Jews act as a cabal or mafia*

There is no organized, hierarchical, and centralized worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Rather the Jews act in a manner similar to al-Qaida: they freelance and self-assemble ad hoc in cross-border networks to tackle specific issues. Jewish organizations - many in cahoots with the Israeli government - serve as administrative backup, same as some Islamic charities do for militant Islam. The Jews' ability and readiness to mobilize and act to further their plans is a matter of record and the source of the inordinate influence of their lobby organizations in Washington, for instance.

When two Jews meet, even randomly, and regardless of the disparities in their background, they immediately endeavor to see how they can further each other's interests, even and often at the expense of everyone else's.

Still, the Jewish diaspora, now two millennia old, is the first truly global phenomenon in world affairs. Bound by a common history, a common set of languages, a common ethos, a common religion, common defenses and ubiquitous enemies - Jews learned to closely cooperate in order to survive.

No wonder that all modern global networks - from Rothschild to Reuters - were established by Jews. Jews also featured prominently in all the revolutionary movements of the past three centuries. Individual Jews - though rarely the Jewish community as a whole - seem to benefit no matter what.

When Czarist Russia collapsed, Jews occupied 7 out of 10 prominent positions in both the Kerensky (a Jew himself) government and in the Lenin and early Stalin administrations. When the Soviet Union crumbled, Jews again benefited mightily. Three quarters of the famous "oligarchs" (robber barons) that absconded with the bulk of the defunct empire's assets were - you guessed it - Jews.

The Jewish Response:

Ignoring the purposefully inflammatory language for a minute, what group does not behave this way? Harvard alumni, the British Commonwealth, the European Union, the Irish or the Italians in the United States, political parties the world over ... As long as people co-operate legally and for legal ends, without breaching ethics and without discriminating against deserving non-members - what is wrong with that?

The Anti-Semite:

Argument number five - ***The Jews are planning to take over the world and establish a world government***

This is the kind of nonsense that discredits a serious study of the Jews and their role in history, past and present. Endless lists of prominent people of Jewish descent are produced in support of the above contention. Yet, governments are not the mere sum of their constituent individuals. The dynamics of power subsist on more than the religious affiliation of office-holders, kingmakers, and string-pullers.

Granted, Jews are well introduced in the echelons of power almost everywhere. But this is still a very far cry from a world government. Neither were Jews prominent in any of the recent moves - mostly by the Europeans - to strengthen the role of international law and attendant supranational organizations.

The Jewish Response:

What can I say? I agree with you. I would only like to set the record straight by pointing out the fact that Jews are actually under-represented in the echelons of power everywhere (including in the United States). Only in Israel - where they constitute an overwhelming majority - do Jews run things.

The Anti-Semite:

Argument number six - ***Jews are selfish, narcissistic, haughty, double-faced, dissemblers. Zionism is an extension of this pathological narcissism as a colonial movement***

Judaism is not missionary. It is elitist. But Zionism has always regarded itself as both a (19th century) national movement ***and*** a (colonial) civilizing force. [Nationalist narcissism](#) transformed Zionism into a mission of acculturation ("White Man's Burden").

In "Altneuland" (translated to Hebrew as "Tel Aviv"), the feverish tome composed by Theodore Herzl, Judaism's improbable visionary - Herzl refers to the Arabs as pliant and compliant butlers, replete with gloves and tarbushes. In the book, a German Jewish family prophetically lands at Jaffa, the only port in erstwhile Palestine. They are welcomed and escorted by "Briticized" Arab gentlemen's gentlemen who are only too happy to assist their future masters and colonizers to disembark.

This age-old narcissistic defence - the Jewish superiority complex - was only exacerbated by the Holocaust.

Nazism posed as a rebellion against the "old ways" - against the hegemonic culture, the upper classes, the established religions, the superpowers, the European

order. The Nazis borrowed the Leninist vocabulary and assimilated it effectively. Hitler and the Nazis were an adolescent movement, a reaction to narcissistic injuries inflicted upon a narcissistic (and rather psychopathic) toddler nation-state. Hitler himself was a malignant narcissist, as Fromm correctly noted.

The Jews constituted a perfect, easily identifiable, embodiment of all that was "wrong" with Europe. They were an old nation, they were eerily disembodied (without a territory), they were cosmopolitan, they were part of the establishment, they were "decadent", they were hated on religious and socio-economic grounds (see Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners"), they were different, they were narcissistic (felt and acted as morally superior), they were everywhere, they were defenseless, they were credulous, they were adaptable (and thus could be co-opted to collaborate in their own destruction). They were the perfect hated father figure and parricide was in fashion.

The Holocaust was a massive trauma *not* because of its dimensions - but because **Germans**, the epitome of Western civilization, have turned on the Jews, the self-proclaimed missionaries of Western civilization in the Levant and Arabia. It was the betrayal that mattered. Rejected by East (as colonial stooges) and West (as agents of racial contamination) alike - the Jews resorted to a series of narcissistic responses reified by the State of Israel.

The long term occupation of territories (metaphorical or physical) is a classic narcissistic behavior (of "annexation" of the other). The Six Days War was a war of self defence - but the swift victory only exacerbated the grandiose fantasies of the Jews. Mastery over the Palestinians became an important component in the psychological makeup of the nation (especially the more rightwing and religious elements) because it constitutes ["Narcissistic Supply"](#).

The Jewish Response:

Happily, sooner or later most anti-Semitic arguments descend into incoherent diatribe. This dialog is no exception.

Zionism was not conceived out of time. It was born in an age of colonialism, Kipling's "white man's burden", and Western narcissism. Regrettably, Herzl did not transcend the political discourse of his period. But Zionism is far more than Altneuland. Herzl died in 1904, having actually been deposed by Zionists from Russia who espoused ideals of equality for all, Jews and non-Jews alike.

The Holocaust was an enormous trauma and a clarion call. It taught the Jews that they cannot continue with their historically abnormal existence and that all the formulas for accommodation and co-existence failed. There remained only one viable solution: a Jewish state as a member of the international community of nations.

The Six Days War was, indeed, a classic example of preemptive self-defense. Its outcomes, however, deeply divide Jewish communities everywhere, especially in Israel. Many of us believe that occupation corrupts and reject the Messianic and millennial delusions of some Jews as dangerous and nefarious.

Perhaps this is the most important thing to remember:

Like every other group of humans, though molded by common experience, Jews are not a monolith. There are liberal Jews and orthodox Jews, narcissists and altruists, unscrupulous and moral, educated and ignorant, criminals and law-abiding citizens. Jews, in other words, are like everyone else. Can we say the same about anti-Semites? I wonder.

The Anti-Israeli:

The State of Israel is likely to end as did the seven previous stabs at Jewish statehood - in total annihilation. And for the same reasons: conflicts between secular and religious Jews and a racist-colonialist pattern of deplorable behavior. The UN has noted this recidivist misconduct in numerous resolutions and when it justly compared Zionism to racism.

The Jewish Response:

Zionism is undoubtedly a typical 19th century national movement, promoting the interests of an ethnically-homogeneous nation. But it is not and never has been a racist movement. Zionists of all stripes never believed in the inherent inferiority or malevolence or impurity of any group of people (however arbitrarily defined or capriciously delimited) just because of their common origin or habitation. The State of Israel is not exclusionary. There are a million Israelis who are Arabs, both Christians and Muslims.

It is true, though, that Jews have a special standing in Israel. The Law of Return grants them immediate citizenship. Because of obvious conflicts of interest, Arabs cannot serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Consequently, they don't enjoy the special benefits conferred on war veterans and ex-soldiers.

Regrettably, it is also true that Arabs are discriminated against and hated by many Israelis, though rarely as a matter of official policy. These are the bitter fruits of the ongoing conflict. Budget priorities are also heavily skewed in favor of schools and infrastructure in Jewish municipalities. A lot remains to be done.

The Anti-Israeli:

Zionism started off as a counter-revolution. It presented itself as an alternative to both orthodox religion and to assimilation in the age of European "Enlightenment".

But it was soon hijacked by East European Jews who espoused a pernicious type of Stalinism and virulent anti-Arab racism.

The Jewish Response:

East European Jews were no doubt more nationalistic and etatist than the West European visionaries who gave birth to Zionism. But, again, they were not racist. On the very contrary. Their socialist roots called for close collaboration and integration of all the ethnicities and nationalities in Israel/Palestine.

The Anti-Israeli:

The "Status Quo" promulgated by Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, confined institutionalized religion to matters of civil law and to communal issues. All affairs of state became the exclusive domain of the secular-leftist nomenclature and its attendant bureaucratic apparatus.

All this changed after the Six Days War in 1967 and, even more so, after the Yom Kippur War. Militant Messianic Jews with radical fundamentalist religious ideologies sought to eradicate the distinction between state and synagogue. They propounded a political agenda, thus invading the traditionally secular turf, to the great consternation of their compatriots.

This schism is unlikely to heal and will be further exacerbated by the inevitable need to confront harsh demographic and geopolitical realities. No matter how much occupied territory Israel gives up and how many ersatz Jews it imports from East Europe, the Palestinians are likely to become a majority within the next 50 years.

Israel will sooner or later face the need to choose whether to institute a policy of strict and racist apartheid - or shrink into an indefensible (though majority Jewish) enclave. The fanatics of the religious right are likely to enthusiastically opt for the first alternative. All the rest of the Jews in Israel are bound to recoil. Civil war will then become unavoidable and with it the demise of yet another short-lived Jewish polity.

The Jewish Response:

Israel is, indeed, faced with the unpalatable choice and demographic realities described above. But don't bet on civil war and total annihilation just yet. There are numerous other political solutions - for instance, a confederacy of two national states, or one state with two nations. But, I agree, this is a serious problem further compounded by Palestinian demands for the right to return to their ancestral territories, now firmly within the Jewish State, even in its pre-1967 borders.

With regards to the hijacking of the national agenda by right-wing, religious fundamentalist Jewish militants - as the recent pullout from Gaza and some of the West Bank proves conclusively, Israelis are pragmatists. The influence of Messianic groups on Israeli decision-making is blown out of proportion. They are an increasingly isolated - though vocal and sometimes violent - minority.

The Anti-Israeli:

Israel could, perhaps, have survived, had it not committed a second mortal sin by transforming itself into an outpost and beacon of Western (first British-French, then American) neo-colonialism. As the representative of the oppressors, it was forced to resort to an official policy of unceasing war crimes and repeated grave violations of human and civil rights.

The Jewish Response:

Israel aligned itself with successive colonial powers in the region because it felt it had no choice, surrounded and outnumbered as it was by hostile, trigger-happy, and heavily armed neighbors. Israel did miss, though, quite a few chances to make peace, however intermittent and hesitant, with its erstwhile enemies. It is also true that it committed itself to a policy of settlements and oppression within the occupied territories which inevitably gave rise to grave and repeated violations on international law. Overlordship of another people had a corrosive corrupting influence on Israeli society.

The Anti-Israeli:

The Arabs, who first welcomed the Jewish settlers and the economic opportunities they represented, turned against the new emigrants when they learned of their agenda of occupation, displacement, and ethnic cleansing. Israel became a pivot of destabilization in the Middle East, embroiled in conflicts and wars too numerous to count. Unscrupulous and corrupt Arab rulers used its existence and the menace it reified as a pretext to avoid democratization, transparency, and accountability.

The Jewish Response:

With the exception of the 1919 Faisal-Weitzman declaration, Arabs never really welcomed the Jews. Attacks on Jewish outposts and settlers started as early as 1921 and never ceased. The wars in 1948 and in 1967 were initiated or provoked by the Arab states. It is true, though, that Israel unwisely leveraged its victories to oppress the Palestinians and for territorial gains, sometimes in cahoots with much despised colonial powers, such as Britain and France in 1956.

The Anti-Israeli:

This volatile mixture of ideological racism, Messianic empire-building, malignant theocracy much resented by the vast majority of secular Jews, and alignment with all entities anti-Arab and anti-Muslim will doom the Jewish country. In the long run, the real inheritors and proprietors of the Middle East are its long-term inhabitants, the Arabs. A strong army is not a guarantee of longevity - see the examples of the USSR and Yugoslavia.

Even now, it is not too late. Israel can transform itself into an important and benevolent regional player by embracing its Arab neighbors and by championing the causes of economic and scientific development, integration, and opposition to outside interference in the region's internal affairs. The Arabs, exhausted by decades of conflict and backwardness, are likely to heave a collective sigh of relief and embrace Israel - reluctantly at first and more warmly as it proves itself a reliable ally and friend.

Israel's demographic problem is more difficult to resolve. It requires Israel to renounce its exclusive racist and theocratic nature. Israel must suppress, by force if need be, the lunatic fringe of militant religious fanatics that has been haunting its politics in the last three decades. And it must extend a welcoming hand to its Arab citizens by legislating and enforcing a set of Civil Rights Laws.

The Jewish Response:

Whether this Jewish state is doomed or not, time will tell. Peace with our Arab neighbors and equal treatment of our Arab citizens should be our two over-riding strategic priorities. The Jewish State cannot continue to live by the sword, lest it perishes by it.

If the will is there it can be done. The alternative is too horrible to contemplate.

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Write to me: palma@unet.com.mk or narcissisticabuse-owner@yahoogroups.com